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SUBJECT: Guangzhou Begins Asian Games Campaign to Promote Its International Image

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Guangzhou held its one-year countdown celebration for the November 2010 16th Asian Games, kicking off an effort to use the Games to advance its image as a modern, cosmopolitan city and a worthy destination for tourists and foreign investment. The countdown ceremony capitalized on the 2009 United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) World Council Meeting in Guangzhou to further raise the international profile of the event. Over 5,000 international and local participants attended the November 12 multi-media extravaganza. Already an economic powerhouse, Guangzhou hopes the Asian Games will give the city the international recognition commensurate with its status as a global trade and manufacturing center, doing for Guangzhou on a smaller scale what the Olympics did for Beijing. Post plans (see final para) to capitalize on the Asian Games to capture goodwill and promote U.S. trade and investment opportunities. END SUMMARY.

Kicking Off a Big Year for Guangzhou

2.(SBU) Over 5,000 people, including representatives from each of the 45 participating National Olympic Committees (NOCs) and many UCLG participants, attended the official November 12 countdown celebration for the 2010 Guangzhou Asian Games, which was widely covered by the region's media. The 16th Asian Games set for November 12-27, 2010, will bring together teams from 45 countries, around 12,000 athletes and tens of thousands of guests and spectators. Guangdong Party Secretary Wang Yang and Sheikh Ahmad Al-Fahad Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister of Kuwait and President of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA), jointly launched the November 12 countdown ceremony. The program performances featured top Guangzhou-based artists, as well as those from different regions of Asia, and sought to amplify the theme of harmony, Asian diversity, and goodwill.

Foreign Local Officials Add International Luster

¶3. (SBU) The city also took advantage of concurrent United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) World Council Meetings, co-hosted by Guangdong and Guangzhou to further raise the profile of the Asian

Games. Guangdong and Guangzhou's senior officials, Beijing luminaries, and 600 international delegates attended the UCLG's series of conferences, speeches, banquets, and ceremonies November 12-14. Guangdong Governor Huang Huahua invited participants to attend the Asian Games and noted that over the past 30 years, Guangdong had "tied knots" with 88 provinces and cities from 37 countries, hosted more than 1,300 groups totaling over 30,000 people and sent 800 delegations abroad. Highlighting the province's remarkable economic performance over the last 30 years, Huang pointed out its strength in the global economy as the 11th largest world trader if taken as an independent economy. The United States was represented by state and local delegations led by Hawaii Governor Linda Lingle and San Francisco City Administrator Edwin Lee, as well as the Consul General. The Consul General met separately with Governor Lingle to discuss trade and investment opportunities for Hawaiian firms in south China and ways to further promote Hawaii as a destination for Guangdong tourists.

Importance to Guangzhou: We Don't Get No Respect

¶4. (SBU) Guangdong and Guangzhou officials see the Asian Games as a critical part of a long-term strategy to raise the profile of the city as an international center and tourism destination. Officials in South China often complain that it is overlooked by international visitors and delegations who favor Beijing, Shanghai, Xian, and Hong Kong. Citizens and officials alike view the Asian Games as an opportunity to display its strength and vibrancy on an international stage -- to put Guangzhou on the map and gain the world's attention.

¶5. (SBU) The city has already invested US\$1.7 billion to construct the Asian Games Town -- a village that will house the athletes and media and which incorporates extensive green technology -- along

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with infrastructure projects city-wide to improve the city's accessibility and living standards. Many buildings are currently swathed in construction scaffolding; fresh paint and road repairs abound as the city gets a face lift in preparation for the games. Guangzhou's 14 million residents will also benefit from the construction of what will become Asia's largest train station, new metro lines, significant renovation of roads, and new IT infrastructure allowing free Internet access city-wide. In addition, Guangzhou hopes to benefit from environmental clean-up efforts, China's largest vacuum system garbage collection that is under construction and the radical improvement of public English signs. The Games will also stimulate and strengthen local business and international trade ties. However, given the global economic crisis, Guangzhou's government has made fiscal responsibility a priority and wants to distance itself, albeit respectfully, from the "expensive" Beijing Olympics.

U.S. Interests and CG Guangzhou Asian Games Action Plan

¶6. (SBU) The high priority provincial and city officials place on the success of the Asian Games and the high level of attention we expect from the public across south China make this a unique opportunity to advance U.S. interests here. Post plans to leverage local public, press and government interest by demonstrating U.S. public support through a series of public diplomacy and media programs that we believe will be warmly received and help improve the United States' image in south China. Post has developed a year-long public diplomacy plan to demonstrate its support and encourage volunteerism. For example, Consulate Guangzhou plans to hold a month-long Weekly Forum series of presentations at local universities on U.S. sports culture and the Asian Games. The CG plans to host a reception for visiting American coaches and local counterparts in the run-up to the Games. Consulate Guangzhou and American community volunteers will support events and make goodwill gifts for the Games. Post has already enjoyed favorable press coverage from the Ambassador's inclusion of the Asian Games in his remarks during his recent visit. We believe public U.S. support for the Asian Games will strengthen relations with local and provincial governments as well as encourage greater mutual exchange and

international understanding. U.S. firms are also pursuing trade and investment opportunities, including opportunities to participate in high-tech green projects.

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